DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 480 883 CS 512 116

AUTHOR	Wollman-Bonilla, Julie
TITLE	Launching Family Message Journals.
INSTITUTION	MarcoPolo Education Foundation.; National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL.; International Reading Association, Newark, DE.
PUB DATE	2003-01-13
NOTE	6p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Managing Editor, ReadWriteThink, International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Rd., P.O. Box 8139, Newark, DE 19714-8139. E-mail: comments@readwritethink.org. For full text: http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Journal Writing; Lesson Plans; *Parent Participation; Primary Education; Spelling; Writing (Composition); Writing Assignments; Writing Improvement; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

This lesson introduces Family Message Journals, a tool for encouraging family involvement and supporting writing to reflect and learn. First and second graders are led into composing through demonstration, guided writing, and finally independent writing of messages that they will bring home for family to read and write a reply. During the three 40-minute sessions, students will begin to use writing for daily communication with families as a tool for reflection on school activities; and become more aware of readers' needs for clarity and legibility and how they can meet these needs. The instructional plan, lists of resources, student assessment/reflection activities, and a list of National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) Standards addressed in the project are included. A sample family letter and an ERIC Digest "Invented Spelling and Spelling Development" (Elaine Lutz) are attached. (RS)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

Launching Family Message Journals

Author

Julie Wollman-Bonilla
Canton, Massachusetts

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. M. Irwin

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 480 883

Grade Band

K-2

Estimated Lesson Time

Three 40-minute sessions

Overview

"Today we did a science activity with apples."

This lesson introduces Family Message Journals—a teacher-tested tool for encouraging family involvement and supporting writing to reflect and to learn. The teacher introduces journals by demonstrating the process of writing a letter. Children are then led into composing through guided writing and finally independent writing of messages that they will bring home for family (or others) to read and write a reply. Messages focus on classroom learning and activities in which children have participated at school. A letter to families is included so that they understand what they are expected to do with the children's daily journal messages and why.

From Theory to Practice

Wollman-Bonilla, Julie. (2000). *Family Message Journals: Teaching Writing Through Family Involvement*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

- Writing is a powerful tool for reflecting on and taking stock of learning.
- Young writers need frequent opportunities to express themselves in writing, trying to match sounds to letters and to communicate clearly and legibly.
- Children need to write for real purposes and audiences if they are to learn that writing is personally meaningful and a powerful communication tool.
- Families are an authentic audience for journal messages about school activities. Children's writing must be clear enough to communicate what happened in school to those who were not there. Family Message Journals help young writers develop awareness of readers' needs.
- Children naturally enjoy communicating with others and learn about content, style, spelling, and other mechanics by writing to be understood and getting feedback on whether they were successful.
- Family Message Journals engage families in modeling writing and create a literacy community inclusive of the classroom and the home.
- Family involvement has a positive effect on children's school achievement.

Student Objectives

Students will

- begin to use writing for daily communication with families as a tool for reflection on school activities.
- become more aware of readers' needs for clarity and legibility and how they can meet these needs.

CS 512 116

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Resources

- Family Letter
- Invented Spelling and Spelling Development Web Site
- Invented Spelling Web Site

Instructional Plan

Resources

1. A booklet or notebook to be used as a journal. Lined paper with an unlined block at the top (for illustrations) works well in the beginning.
2. Copies of the family letter.
3. Back-up people to reply if a child's family members don't. (The letter and pressure from children make this a rare occurrence, but there are always one or two families who cannot reply regularly. In this case, a student teacher in the school, a special subject teacher, the principal, or librarian are good options.)

Preparation

1. Choose the activity, book, or experience about which children will write their first two messages. This could be a book read aloud, a science inquiry, a social studies lesson, a school assembly, the experience of the first day at school, making new friends, or any other topic drawing on school experiences.
2. Choose a topic for the demonstration message that you'll compose for students.
3. Prepare and photocopy the Family Letter. Have it translated into families' home languages as necessary.

Instruction and Activities

1. Tell students "In our classroom you will be writing letters to your family about things you do in school. I'm going to write one first to show you what I mean." Think aloud: "What should I write about? Hmmm, what did we do in school today? Oh, I know, I'll write about the science actvitiy we just did before recess, when we compared different kinds of apples. I'll start by putting the date up here in the right corner and on the left side I'll write 'Dear family.'" (demonstrate on chart paper or chalkboard as you speak). "Now, that's how a letter looks. It starts with a date and greeting" (point at each again).
2. "What are some of the things I could write about the apple activity?" Invite children to brainstorm ideas and discuss whether and why the suggested ideas are important to tell families.
3. Once a number of ideas have been suggested, begin composing: "Okay, I think I'll begin with 'Today we did a science activity with apples. We observed eight different kinds of apples and cut them all in half.'" Stop and point out where you started the body of the letter, under the greeting. Continue composing based on some of the children's suggestions. Discuss what needs to go in the letter to make it clear. For example, "I can't just say, 'Each had them inside'" because someone reading your letter at home won't know what they had inside.' That's why I wrote 'Each was a different color and weight but they all had small, slippery, black seeds inside.'" As you compose think aloud about content decisions and model how to listen for the sounds in a word and invent a spelling.
4. Once the message is complete tell students they will begin their own messages in their own Family Message Journals. (This could be done in a second session). Tell them what activity or experience they will write about. Something learned or read or discussed or experienced that day works well—anything can be the topic of a message. For example, they might write a response to a book read aloud.
5. Once children open their journals and are ready to write, ask them how they will begin their

message. "Will you write 'Dear Family' or 'Dear Mom' or 'Dear Grandma' or 'Dear [older sister's name]?' Who at home might read your message?" Ask children to write their date and greeting and then ask "What could you write next?" After a few ideas are shared ask children to begin the message. Circulate to help as needed. Notice things children have done and share them, for example, "Oh, Pat wrote 'We read a book called _____.' That's good because whoever reads Pat's message will know what it is about."

6. As they write, remind children to listen for the sounds they want to write and spell it as best they can. "This is your letter with your spelling." Because children can read the messages to their families at home or tell them what the messages are about, it is okay if the spellings are not clear to families. Children will learn from this that they need to work at spelling but they will still be able to share their messages and get response. (For children whose home language is not English: They may write in English and tell their families what it says, or they may write their home language if that seems most appropriate. Families may reply in the home language if that is most comfortable and children can understand it.)
7. As children announce they are finished, ask if there's anything they can add to make the message clearer to family members or to provide helpful detail. Suggest an example or two of such detail from your demonstration message. For example: "See how I wrote 'The school looked huge and there were hundreds of people wandering around. I didn't know how I would find my teacher but all of a sudden she found me!'" Encourage children to add at least one thing to their messages. Finally, invite children to illustrate their messages. Illustration gives way to more writing as the year goes on, but in the beginning many ideas are communicated through drawing and drawing may spark ideas for additions to the written message.
8. Provide children with the Family Letter to place in their journals. Remind children that this is their homework: "Show the Family Letter and message to someone in your family who can read it, have that person write a response, and bring the journal back to school the next day."
9. The following day begin with a reminder of where to place the date and greeting and where to begin the message. Then have children brainstorm ideas for the message topic you've chosen and begin writing independently. Continue to circulate to provide support, share suggestions, and recognize what children are doing that others might want to try (e.g. varying greetings or paying careful attention to printing neatly so its legible). Such support may be needed for the first week or two. After that children should be able to generate ideas and begin messages independently, though brainstorming ideas to share may continue as appropriate.

Web Resources

Invented Spelling and Spelling Development
http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed272922.html
A brief overview for teachers and families on invented spelling and writing development.

Invented Spelling
http://www.naturalchild.com/guest/margaret_phinney2.html
A teacher explains invented spelling and emergent writing and includes suggestions for families to encourage children's writing and appreciate invented spellings.

Student Assessment/Reflections

1. Observe as students compose: What are they struggling with? What is getting easier? Are they using suggestions from you and other students? Are they excited about writing messages and sharing family replies?
2. Review student journals regularly looking for knowledge of
   - appropriate content for a message (e.g., enough detail and explanation)
   - text-level conventions (e.g., letter format, style appropriate to topic)
   - sentence-level conventions (e.g., punctuation, grammar)
   - word-level conventions (e.g., spelling)
   - topic studied or activity experienced
3. Keep anecdotal notes about your observations and review of journals. Save a photocopy of a sample journal entry every two to four weeks to use for comparison and evidence of growth or

need for instructional support.

NCTE/IRA Standards

4 - Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

5 - Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

6 - Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.

11 - Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

12 - Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

read·write·think

International Reading Association NCTE marcopolo

Copyright 2002-2003, IRA/NCTE. All rights reserved.

Attachments:
Family Letter:

September XX, 200X

Dear Families,

This is your child's Family Message Journal. Your child will be bringing it home for homework everyday. Please read the day's message and ask your child to tell you about the message and drawing. Do not worry if the message is difficult for you to read—it is written in first-grade spelling. Your child's messages become easier to read over the course of the year.

Print a message back to your child just below his or her message. Write about the same topic. Write your message in letter format, like this letter (date at the top right, a greeting on the left and the message below that, and a closing). Have your child read your message over with you. This entire process should take no more than 10-15 minutes each day but it is very important to your child's learning that you do it daily. Anyone at home may write back to your child—a parent, another relative or sibling, or a family friend. The important thing is that your child receive a reply. The Family Message Journal must come back to school each day. Your child will be sharing your reply with me and with the class at times. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for working with your child on this important homework!

Sincerely,

read·write·think NCTE marcopolo Copyright 2003 NCTE/IRA. All rights reserved. ReadWriteThink materials may be reproduced for educational purposes.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

[X] This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

[ ] This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").